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Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Helena, MT 59620-0701
September 16, 1994

Dear Participant:

The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) is considering an offer from the Mikal Kellner Foundation For Animals, which involves donating an in-holding at Spring Meadow Lake State Park to FWP.

Additional elements of the proposal involve constructing a nature center on the new park property, upgrading and relocating the existing animal rehabilitation center from Custer Avenue to the site, and moving the Helena Area Office from the Capitol complex to Spring Meadow Lake. One option being considered is remodeling existing historic buildings on the site for the proposed uses.

The Department is evaluating the Kellner Foundation's offer by preparing an Environmental Assessment. Your participation in this evaluation is important; we need your assistance to complete a thorough analysis. Please spend a few minutes reading the attached scoping document, which provides an overview of some of the issues and alternatives. If you have an interest in this project, please let us know how you might be affected. What issues should be considered before the Department makes its decision? Why are those issues important to you?

If you would like to talk with someone about this proposal, please call either Ken Soderberg or Jeff Erickson of the Parks Division staff in Helena (444-3750), or Jerry Walker in our Bozeman office (994-3552). Written comments must be received **by October 17, 1994**, and should be sent to the following: Jerry Walker, Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, 1400 South 19th, Bozeman, MT, 59715.

An information open house for this proposal is scheduled on October 5, 1994 from 3:00 to 8:00 p.m. in the Department's Helena headquarters, 1420 E. 6th. Ave. An open house is an unstructured format that allows people to participate, at their convenience, anytime during the five hour session. No formal presentation is scheduled at the open house, but Parks Division staff will be on hand to explain the alternatives and answer questions.

Thank you for your interest in this proposal.

Sincerely,

Pat Graham

Pat Graham, Director
Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks

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SPRING MEADOW LAKE STATE PARK NATURE CENTER ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT - SCOPING DOCUMENT

Problem Statement

A number of underlying problems and deficiencies directly led to the nature center proposal, as summarized below:

1. **Deficiencies at Existing Animal Shelter:** The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) has the responsibility for caring for orphaned, sick, and injured wild animals. A wildlife rehabilitation center located on Custer Avenue in Helena is currently operated for this purpose.

   The existing facilities are unsanitary, severely overcrowded, and inadequate for certain species such as bears and raptors. This facility was never intended to accommodate public visitation. Specific deficiencies at the current shelter include absence of heat, inadequate sewage disposal, and lack of space for isolating sick animals, poor accessibility and encroaching outside development. Opportunities for interpreting wildlife rehabilitation to the public are not being maximized because of the deficient facilities, even though the site has up to 500 visitors a day. Because of conditions at the site, FWP has difficulty fulfilling its animal rehabilitation mandate in a humane, efficient, and educational manner. If action is not taken the animal shelter may have to be closed due to inability to meet public health and safety standards.

2. **Lack of Existing Nature Interpretation Facilities:** There is currently no year-round nature center of state-wide scope in Montana. The development of a facility focusing on ecological systems and their interrelationships is a critical need in the state. Public demand for more fish and wildlife interpretation is increasing. Each year the department turns down more and more requests to accommodate school programs.

   In addition to the general public, specific groups expected to directly benefit from a new nature center include school children, senior citizens, the Montana Conservation Corps, the disabled community, and tourists. Currently, there is a significant unmet demand for nature interpretation among school age children. As evidence of demand for such a facility, 600 students participated in nature education programs at Spring Meadow Lake last year. During another 5 week period last year, 2,500 students took part in an eagle watching program in the Helena area. Having a facility located in a state park which is designed for these activities will increase FWP's ability to provide high quality educational programs for a larger number of students.

3. **Inadequate Location for FWP's Helena Area Regional Office:** The location and design of Helena Area Regional Offices do not adequately meet public needs. Traffic problems currently impede access. The current site was developed as an administrative site not as a public service area. Relocating the office to Spring Meadow Lake would enhance public services offered by improving visitor accessibility and providing sufficient space for public meetings. An additional benefit would be the provision of greater security for animals at the rehabilitation center, and an on-site staff presence at the nature center.

4. **Uncertainty of Future Land Uses on Park In-holding:** If the property in question is not added to Spring Lake Meadow State Park, there is a possibility that future land uses could emerge which would be incompatible with the park. The parcel is clearly visible from the Spring Meadow Lake shoreline, and particular types of development on the site could have severe, long-term, negative impacts on the natural environment of the park and the recreational uses it supports. Adding this parcel to the park will eliminate this threat.

Proposed Action

FWP and the Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission propose to develop a nature center at Spring Meadow Lake, according to the following scenario:

1. Accept the Stedman's Foundry property, a 5.3 acre inholding at Spring Meadow Lake State Park, from the Mikal Kellner Foundation For Animals in exchange for a comparable value portion of FWP's Custer Avenue property.

2. The Kellner Foundation sells the surplus Custer Avenue property it received from FWP in the exchange.

3. Upon the sale of the Custer Avenue property, FWP accepts a donation of the sale proceeds from the Kellner Foundation, and uses those revenues to help develop the nature center complex.

4. FWP develops the Stedman's Foundry property as a state-wide nature, education and visitor center; an expanded, Montana animal rehabilitation center to replace the Custer Area facility; and, an area office to better serve the public in the Helena area.

Benefits of the Proposed Action

The following are the expected public benefits of this project, if completed as proposed:

1. Improved capability to rehabilitate orphaned or injured wildlife.

2. Enhanced public understanding of animal rehabilitation and its proper role in wildlife management.

3. Enhanced public understanding of fish and wildlife, and their habitat requirements.

4. Enhanced scientific educational opportunities, especially hands-on opportunities for children and youth.

5. Availability of a training center for youth service corps, the public, teachers and other service providers.

6. Enhanced delivery of department services to Helena area citizens and visitors.

7. An additional Helena-area attraction for tourists.

8. Enhanced recreational opportunities for Helenans and their families.

9. Protection of Spring Meadow Lake State Park from non-compatible uses on this inholding.

10. Opportunity for the Department to serve a broader constituency and a diversity of outdoor interests.

11. Opportunity to establish a model nature educational center, with potential application in other communities.

12. Opportunity to demonstrate and teach the principles of sustainable ecosystems.

13. Opportunity for FWP to convey to the public its mission and purpose through displays and programs.

14. Opportunity to form partnerships with other agencies and organizations to help plan, fund, and implement the proposed improvements.

Decisions to be Made

The Department's and Commission's primary decision is whether to accept the Stedman's Foundry property for the purpose of developing the nature complex. Within the primary decision, there are a number of other decisions which need to be made, as listed below:

1. If the property is to be obtained, what is the appropriate method of acquisition? Should FWP and the Commission approve the proposed property exchange or should the Stedman's Foundry property be accepted as a direct donation from the Kellner Foundation?

2. If the property is acquired, what is the appropriate approach to development? Should the historic, nineteenth century buildings on the site be renovated, or should those historic buildings be removed and new structures erected?

3. What public services should the Department provide and what facilities are necessary to deliver those services?

4. If the animal rehabilitation facility and area office are relocated to the nature complex, what is the appropriate use of the Custer Avenue property? If this property is disposed of, what is the appropriate method?

Other Issues to Be Addressed:

An environmental assessment is planned to analyze the options discussed above, and other relevant issues and alternatives raised during this scoping phase. No decision on the alternatives will be made until after the environmental assessment has been completed. Some of the most important issues identified so far that will need to be discussed in the environmental assessment include the following:

1. Environmental contamination related to past uses at the site.

2. Historical and archaeological issues.

3. Issues related to wildlife and vegetation on and near the site.

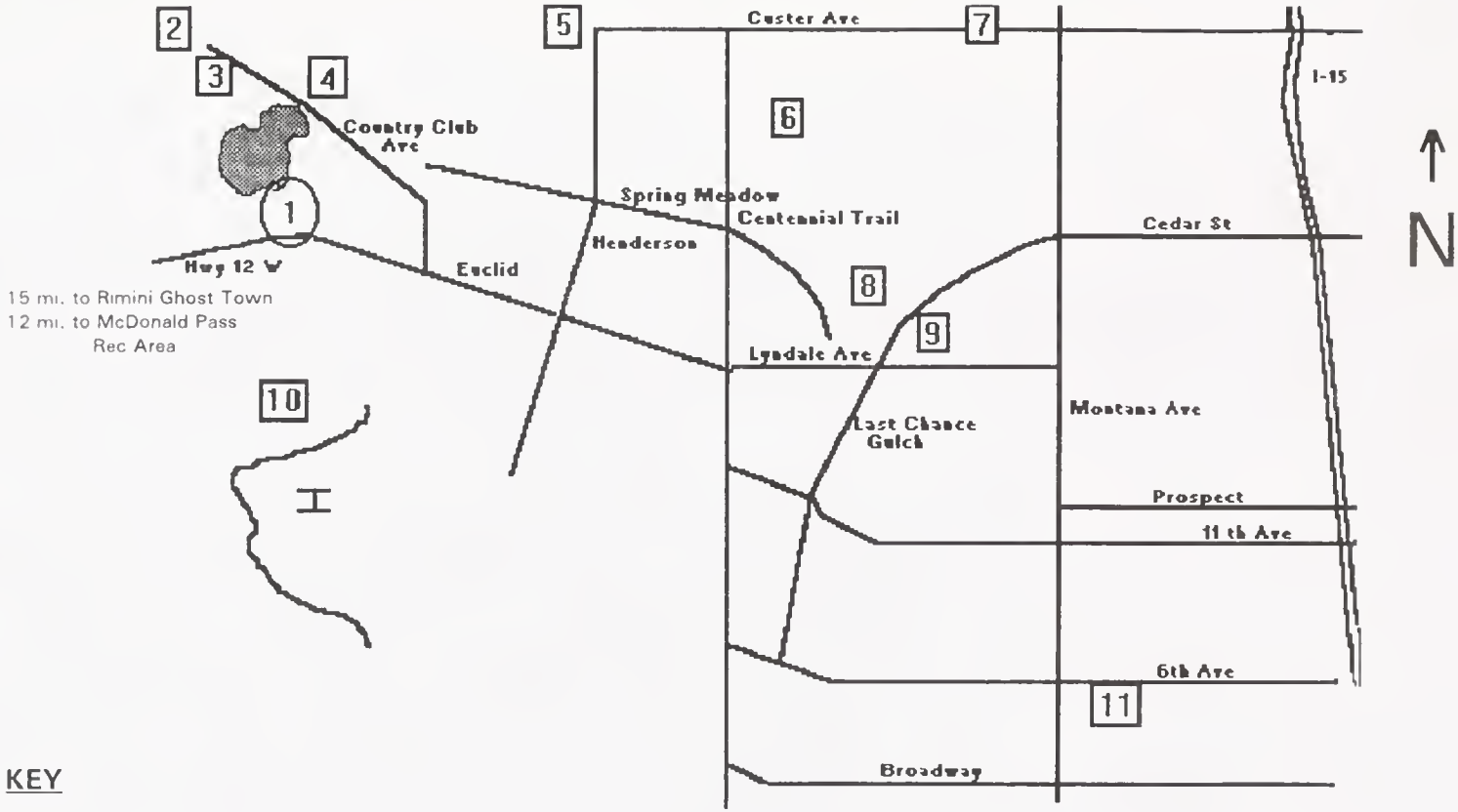
4. Social and economic issues.

5. Recreation issues.

6. Aesthetic issues.

In addition to the issues listed above, there may be others people would like addressed. If you can think of additional issues, or have other comments, a comment form is attached.

PROJECT LOCATION

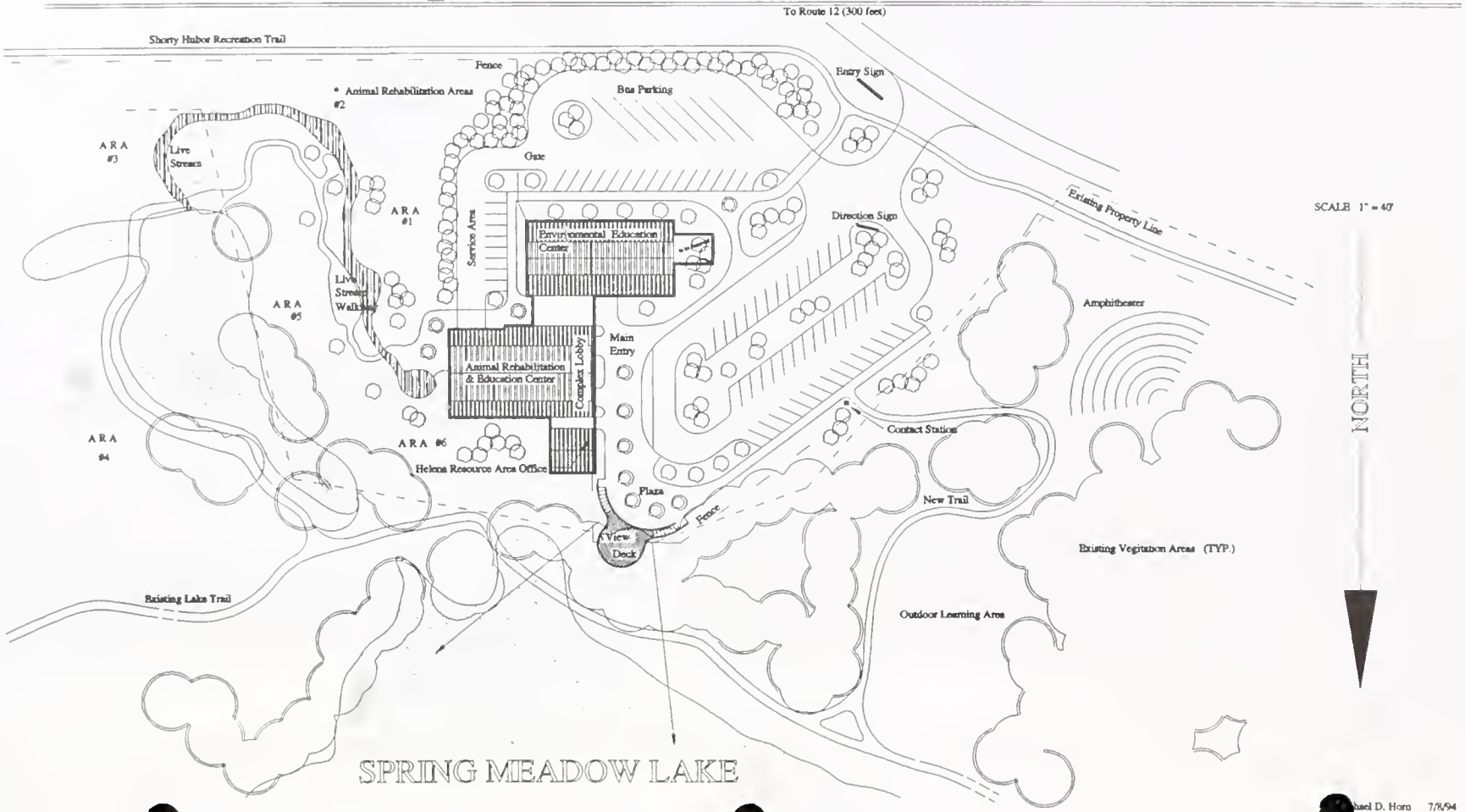


KEY

1 Proposed Spring Meadow Lake State Park Nature Complex
2 Fort Harrison
3 Archie Bray Foundation
4 Green Meadow Country Club
5 Lewis & Clark County Fairgrounds
6 Bill Roberts Golf Course
7 Current Location of FWP Animal Shelter
8 Centennial Park/Helena YMCA
9 Memorial Park
10 Mount Helena City Park
11 State Capitol Complex

SPRING MEADOW LAKE
Nature Complex

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks



Michael D. Horn 7/8/94

COMMENT FORM:

PROPOSED SPRING MEADOW LAKE STATE PARK NATURE CENTER

You are encouraged to help Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) identify issues which should be analyzed in the forthcoming environmental assessment. You may write your comments on this sheet, or convey them to FWP staff over the phone (444-3750) or at the open house planned for October 5, from 3:00 to 8:00 P.M. at FWP headquarters in Helena. Feel free to use additional paper if you need it. If you wish to mail the form back to FWP, fold twice so the return address is on the outside. Comments must be received by the end of the day on Monday, October 17.

1) What do you think the most important issues associated with this project are?

2) Can you think of additional project-related issues which are not discussed in the scoping document, or any of the other project-related material you have seen?

3) Can you think of additional alternatives for this site which have not been discussed in any of the material you have seen? Is there a particular alternative you prefer?

4) What do you think the most important benefits and/or adverse impacts of this project are?

5) Do you have any additional comments?

ATTENTION: JERRY WALKER
MT. DEPT. OF FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
1400 SOUTH 19TH
BOZEMAN, MONTANA 59715

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